

California Trip

My California horsebacking trip.

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Me on a horse.
Even the spiders are missing!
Kevin Bacon the potbellied pig.

Over this last Thanksgiving holiday, I flew to Las Vegas to visit my family, and while there, I had the opportunity to go horseback riding at a ranch in California for a day. The weather was cool and I didn't get to see any herps, but I thought I would still share my adventures in the great outdoors.

This was the first time I had seen the desert and mountains up close (other than seeing them from an airplane). In all the times I've been to Vegas, I've never ventured outside of the city – only ever glimpsing the mountains in the background. It was amazing to me that less than an hour away from the thriving city was this majestic, wide open expanse of land stretching seemingly forever, only broken up by Joshua trees, scrub bushes, and outcroppings of rock.

My mom's cousin leases a horse at a ranch (I didn't even know this was possible!), so she is the one who invited me to come spend the day there and join them in their daily ride through the desert. Before we embarked on our lengthy journey, they had me sign a liability waiver absolving them of all responsibility in the event of injury or death, and authorizing them to bury me in the desert should the need arise. Paperwork signed, we were then on our way.

There were four of us riding together, but we also had an entourage of assorted ranch dogs that followed us the entire time. Breathtaking scenery aside, I didn't see an abundance of wildlife other than some scattered birds, a young jack rabbit too busy sprinting from our doggy pals to pose for a picture. However, I did see evidence of animal activity everywhere I looked. I witnessed what must have amounted to hundreds of burrows and dens left by lizards, snakes and rodents. I also saw tail markings in the sand, various tracks left by coyotes and several heavily webbed entrances to spider lairs. The only thing missing was the residents of all these empty abodes, so it was like being surrounded by a ghost town.

I must say, the highlight of my trip to California was meeting Kevin Bacon. Not the actor, but a potbellied pig by the same name that lives on the ranch. His very luxurious head of hair would be enough to make any balding man jealous. He appeared to be a shy pig, although I'm sure he would have been a lot more nervous if he knew just how delicious his kind is!

After my fun and adventurous day in the desert (although physically exhausting), I've decided that I've got to go back some time, maybe in the springtime or early fall, so I can experience all of the nature and critters that were absent on this trip. So perhaps next time with warmer weather, herping on horseback will be more productive.

-The Toad Talker

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